

our veterans. My amendment is supported by the VFW.

I spoke to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson earlier today, and he informed me that he had announced that the VA will provide credit monitoring and data theft protection, and at no cost to the servicemembers and veterans. I thank Secretary Nicholson for making this sound and responsible decision.

I also rise in strong opposition to the amendments brought forth by Senators KERRY and LEVIN which, in my view, is a vacillating strategic plan of retreat. We don't need a plan of retreat. We need to have a steady, strategic plan for success in the war on terror and, in particular, in the theater of Iraq. We need to honor our troops and honor their families, whether they are serving now, or those who have fallen in the midst of this battlefield in Iraq.

We need to move forward in Iraq, and we need to unite all Americans behind our mission, unite Americans behind a strategic plan for success, bringing Americans together, and also our NATO partners and other allies, and get the neighbors of Iraq together, whether they be Jordan, Turkey, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia—they are all important—rather than Senator KERRY's plan, which is a plan for retreat, a tuck-tail-and-run approach. That is not what is needed.

We want to see this new unity, diverse Government elected by the people of Iraq, have a chance to stand on its own feet and defend its own interests. We want to see measured, tangible success as quickly as possible, and we want to bring home our troops as soon as possible. But I believe some on the other side of the aisle are too anxious, and that would be retreating. This is not the sort of steady leadership that I believe would unite the American people.

Moreover, I think this approach can embolden our enemies. It would show a weakened resolve in the midst of this war on terror. The terrorists always talk about the United States and Mogadishu or the Beirut bombing and how Americans will retreat. We don't need to be emboldening our enemies. Moreover, it can cause discouragement and dismay to the Iraqi leaders who are bravely trying to stand up for a free and just society. It also can be a discredit to the United States in the eyes of some of our allies. Our European allies came out strongly in support of us today, for example, in our negotiations with Iran and telling the Iranian leaders: You ought to take the carrot, take the right approach. It is important as we deal with the Iranians that the United States shows there is a resolve and a commitment to sticking to a path of security and peace.

Just a few weeks ago, I was on a bipartisan delegation to Iraq. Everyone we spoke with, whether they were Kurds, Sunnis, or Shiites, was grateful to the United States for liberating them from that repressive regime. We

asked what would happen if we left in 6 months. They all said it would be a "disaster." That was the word we heard more than anything else. Even the Sunni speaker of the new assembly, who was once imprisoned by the United States, said that if the U.S. military left—as a Sunni who was once imprisoned and was against the United States being there in the first place—he said to us, as he said subsequently to the President, that: We are grateful, and the U.S. military presence in Iraq is helpful to them. If we left, then those who would come in would be the Iranians, the Syrians, or potentially, of course, in the north, the Turks.

We are making progress. We are fighting vile terrorists. We need to understand who we are fighting. These terrorists are beheading men and women in Iraq. Meanwhile, the United States and our coalition partners are trying to give the Iraqis the chance to vote, to have a say on their public servants in that country.

We are also making progress on the security fronts. General Casey relayed to us that, right now, maybe a quarter of military operations are led by Iraqis. He said that by the end of the year, as much as three-quarters of the military operations will be led by the Iraqis, with the United States being in a supportive role for medical, intelligence, and military efforts.

Mr. President, I know Iraq has been tough. It is a tough battlefield for Americans. But it is a war and a theater in this war on terror that we can win and must win. The next few months will be vitally important. This is not the time to get weak in the knees. The future of Iraq is ultimately the responsibility of the Iraqi people. It is going to be the Iraqis' hands, backs, and minds that will be needed to build a secure and free Iraq. We don't want to stay a day longer than absolutely necessary. We are supporting Iraq in this because we are a generous people, but it is also good for our national security.

So I think we need to make sure that Senator KERRY's strategic plan for retreat—a tuck-tail-and-fail approach—must be rejected. We must unite as Americans for a renewed commitment for a strategic plan for success. It is important for Iraq, important for the Middle East, and it is vitally important for the security of the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska is recognized.

MR. HAGEM. Mr. President, I thank the sponsors of this amendment, Senators LEVIN and REED, for offering a thoughtful amendment. They are making a responsible contribution to this debate. All Americans want a successful outcome in Iraq. Congress has an obligation to help craft a responsible policy to help achieve a successful outcome in Iraq. Congress fails in its duty when we do not probe, when we do not ask tough questions, and we fail when

we don't debate the great issues of our day.

There is no issue more important than war. The war in Iraq is the defining issue on which this Congress and the administration will be judged. The American people want to see serious debate about serious issues from serious leaders. They deserve more than a political debate. This debate should transcend cynical attempts to turn public frustration with the war in Iraq into an electoral advantage. It should be taken more seriously than to simply use the focus group-tested buzzwords like "cut and run" and political slogans and debase the seriousness of war. War is not a partisan issue. It should not be held hostage to political agendas. War should not be dragged into the political muck. America deserves better. Our men and women fighting and dying deserve better.

As mentioned earlier by Senator FEINSTEIN and others, there was a very important piece in yesterday's Washington Post, written by Iraq's National Security Adviser. It was titled "The Way Out of Iraq; A Roadmap." The National Security Adviser's op-ed mentions three very important things we need to clearly understand. The first thing this op-ed provides is measurable goals for the progress of the Iraqi Government with regard to U.S. troop presence. The Iraqi National Security Adviser says this:

Iraq's ambition is to have full control of their country by the end of 2008. In practice, this will mean a significant foreign troop reduction. We envision the U.S. troop presence by year's end to be under 100,000, with most of the remaining troops to return home by the year 2007.

The second point the op-ed makes clear is the unavoidable reality that an endless U.S. troop presence is not in the interest of the new Iraqi Government. The Iraqi National Security Adviser says this:

The eventual removal of coalition troops from Iraqi streets will help Iraqis who now see foreign troops as occupiers rather than the liberators they were meant to be. The removal of troops will also allow the Iraqi government to engage with some of our neighbors that have, to date, been at the very least sympathetic to the resistance because of what they call the "coalition occupation." The removal of foreign troops will legitimize Iraq's government in the eyes of the people.

He makes clear that it will be the Iraqis who determine the success of the Iraqi Government. He says:

The government in Iraq is trying to gain its independence from the United States and the coalition, in terms of taking greater responsibility for its actions, particularly in terms of security. There are still some influential foreign figures trying to spoon feed our government and take a very proactive role in many key decisions. Though this may provide benefits in the short-term, in the long term it will only serve to make the Iraqi government weaker and will lead to a culture of dependency.

I believe the Iraqi national security adviser has it exactly right. After all, he is the Iraqi national security adviser. Americans listening to this debate on Iraq are too often being given